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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2006

In Today's Papers

National Education Convention

All papers report that a prominent teachers' union yesterday walked out of the 17th Education Convention which started on Monday amid heated debate over the legal situation of the Imam Hatip schools, institutions designed to train Islamic clerics. In 1999, following the 1997 army intervention in politics known as the February 28 process, the power of the Imam Hatip schools was curbed with a series of laws lengthening compulsory education to eight years and introducing a restricted admission system for graduates from vocational school, including those from Imam Hatip. The latter law was enacted especially to restrict Imam Hatip graduates from entering every department of universities like regular high school graduates. Yesterday, on the third day of the National Education Council meeting, a proposal that would pave the path for Imam Hatip schools to gain the status of regular high school was adopted. CHP leader Deniz Baykal criticized the Education Convention, saying that Minister Celik's aim is to use the convention to further political goals. Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen's Association (TUSIAD) also voiced strong reactions to the proposal and also stressed that the National Education Council meeting had been manipulated for political goals.

General Basbug Comments on Turkey-France Military Ties

Sabah, Zaman, Milliyet and others: Today's papers give extensive coverage to the comments of Land Forces Commander General Ilker Basbug at a reception held to mark the 23rd anniversary of the founding of Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). General Basbug said that following the French Assembly's adoption a resolution on the so-called Armenian genocide, military relations with France had been suspended.

Iraqi PM Maliki in Ankara Today

Turkiye, Cumhuriyet, Bugun and others: Iraqi PM Maliki is coming to Ankara today for an official visit, as the guest of PM Erdogan. Maliki was scheduled to visit Turkey last month but, the visit was

postponed due to a sand storm in Baghdad. He will be received by President Sezer, as well. During the visit, Turkish officials will stress that the sheltering of PKK terrorists in Iraq is unacceptable and Maliki will be urged to capture PKK terrorists based in Iraq and hand them over to Turkey.

Several prominent Turkish commentators voice hope for change in American policy on Iraq in the aftermath of the Congressional elections. One editorial today designs a significant plan for the US to pull out from Iraq with less painful consequences, and the other suggests that Turkey and the US might enjoy a better working relationship if the Washington administration changes its strategy with the help of Democrat majority in the Congress.

In his column in the liberal-intellectual Radikal, Gunduz Aktan laid out a plan to save Iraq: "The US acted unilaterally when it started the war in Iraq. With the new composition of the US Congress, there is hope for change in the Iraq policy. In this regard, the US has to make sure that withdrawing from Iraq is not going to be a unilateral act. If the US acts unilaterally on the withdrawal, consequences will be even more severe than the first mistake. When the US occupied Iraq, there was certainly a possibility of winning this game. Yet the current situation indicates a clear defeat for the US and thus America has to set the rules for ending the game by acting together with the international community. An international commission is needed to prevent any undesired possibility for the future of Iraq, including a divided country or a country driven into a civil war. Such an international body should consist of all of Iraq's neighbors as well as permanent members of the UNSC and the members of the Arab League. Even the participation of Israel, the EU and the Islamic Conference Organization may also be considered. Guaranteeing Iraq's territorial integrity on an international scale as well as establishing consensus between the Iraqi groups prior to

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the withdrawal of American forces will have to be the main focus of this commission. Deploying a peacekeeping force from Muslim nations other than Iraqi neighbors may also be considered. "

Writing in the Islamist-intellectual Zaman, Sahin Alpay expressed hope for a strategy change: "Thanks to democracy, with the recent Congressional election results, America was given the chance to correct its previous mistakes on Iraq and foreign policy. We hope that Democrats will use this opportunity to correct past mistakes, work to change its unilateral foreign policy stance and focus on acting together with the international community, as well as show respect for international norms and standards. The truth is that there is a very long way to go for the US administration to correct its mistakes, particularly on Iraq and Palestine, and to regain its prestige worldwide. Stability in Iraq requires an extensive dialogue between Washington and the neighbors of Iraq, including Iran and Syria. The US should change its threatening and pressuring policy against Tehran and Damascus. The PKK presence in northern Iraq must come to an end. Iran should get an assurance from the US that there will be no strike from America, and that Washington will not tolerate any Israeli attack on Iran. Washington has to realize that its current policy on Iran and Syria only helps to enhance radical movements and authoritarian regimes. The US strategy for the Middle East and Iraq will undoubtedly be a determining factor in shaping the Turkish-American dialogue in the next period to come. Depending on the nature of the US strategy, Turkey and the US might end up collaborating very closely on the Middle East."

Headscarf Rights

Cumhuriyet, Zaman, Yeni Safak, Milliyet and others: US State Department's Ambassador-at-Large for Religious Freedom John Hanford said that the US supports the right of Turkish women to wear headscarves. Stressing that the US respects internationally recognized rights concerning the freedom of religion, Hanford said, "we have supported the rights of Muslims all over the world and we have protested the ways that the countries' administrations banned or limited the act of worship."

Islamist-Leaning Business Association (MUSIAD) Congress

Vatan reports that MUSIAD will host the 10th International Business Forum Congress in Istanbul on November 22-26. Five thousand Muslim

businessmen from 55 countries will join the congress. Prime Minister Erdogan will open the congress.

TV Highlights
NTV, 6.00 A.M.

Domestic News

- Former Iranian President Khatami said that military operations would not help solve the PKK problem
- State Minister Ali Babacan asks for NGO support on amending Article 301, the article in the Turkish penal code under which writers and journalists have been prosecuted for "insulting Turkishness"
- The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) celebrates the 23rd anniversary of its founding

International News

- A US Army soldier has pleaded guilty to raping a 14-year-old Iraqi girl and murdering her and her family
- The European Parliament will discuss the situation in the ghost town of Maras and the isolation of Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus

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